

Ideas & Trends

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U.C.L.A. Spooks, If Any, Are Safe

Can Mr. Chips be brought in from the cold? A Federal appeals court ruled last week that this is nobody's business, except for the Central Intelligence Agency. Three judges ruled unanimously against a University of California at Los Angeles student who had sought information about agency activities on campus under the Freedom of Information Act.

With the support of a broad range of U.C.L.A. organizations, Nathan Gardels filed a request in 1976 after Senate Intelligence Committee hearings disclosed that hundreds of academics in more than 100 American colleges were covertly linked to the C.I.A. (The agency maintains these contacts as confidential sources of expertise and for help in recruiting foreign intelligence sources.) "We perceive this covert presence and operation of the C.I.A. on American campuses as a direct threat to our democratic rights under the principles of academic freedom and integrity," Mr. Gardels wrote.

The appellate judges ruled that "to admit that the C.I.A. had such contacts at this university would allow foreign intelligence agencies to zero in and identify... the nature of those relationships or with whom." The court thus followed statutes that enable C.I.A. directors to protect their sources and methods. But it rejected an argument that disclosures would result in campus harassment.

"This is an ominous decision for future Freedom of Information Act litigation in national security cases," said Susan Shaffer, an attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union. She said Congressional action might be necessary to reaffirm the intention expressed in 1974 amendments to the act — that courts undertake *de novo* review of intelligence agencies' decisions to withhold information.